UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Performing Arts Division of Cinema, University Park, Los Angeles, Calif. 90007

(213) 746-2235

August 5, 1970

Mr. Burgess Meredith
c/o Mr. Jack Gilardi
Creative Management Assoc., Ltd.
8899 Beverly Boulevard
Los Angeles, California 90048

Dear Mr. Meredith:

I am writing to you concerning a film that is presently being completed at the Cinema Department of the University of Southern California. For the past year and a half my collegue, Bruton Peterson, and I have been making a documentary film concerning Mineral King. As you probably know, Mineral King is an area of alpine wilderness bordered on three sides by Sequoia National Park in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. At present Mineral King and the surrounding areas are ready to be developed into a multi-million dollar recreation-resort for the U. S. Forest Service by the Walt Disney Corporation. The Sierra Club, and the United States Government are presently litigants in a law suit which may decide whether or not the Disney Corporation shall be allowed to begin development in this valley.

My collegue and I are therefore making this hour-long documentary film to inform the American public of this controversy and the subsequent threat to the existing three per cent of the American wilderness. The film has cost to date approximately $8,000 (a large sum for a student production), and all funds have been raised by private donations including a $1,500 grant from the Sierra Club Foundation. The film is a totally non-profit-making venture, planned and executed by those artists and filmmakers who have made a firm stand on their belief in man's inherent ties with his environment, a commodity that is rapidly disappearing from our lives. Mineral King is by no means the final fight, but it is a step in communicating to most Americans that the environmental crisis is very real and there is something they can do to begin solving what appear as overwhelming odds.

The film is a combination of the history of Mineral King and an essay on the environmental crisis with Mineral King as the primary contemporary issue. I shall briefly outline the areas that the film will cover.

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I. An introduction to the American landscape as seen through the eyes of the American landscape painters, Thomas Moran, Thomas Cole, and Albert Bierstadt, depicts the discovery and first representation of the virgin wilderness to the West. In 1780 there was land, more land than our European forefathers had ever known--boundless primeval wilderness, untouched, unspoiled. By 1870 the paintings of Cole and Bierstadt were only memories of a short-lived American dream.

II. A spiritualist farmer, aided by the spirit of a deceased Indian, discovers silver in a small valley, and overnight the valley is a boom town. We trace the founding of Mineral King as a mining town utilizing a combination of live action photography and original photographs (extensive research has uncovered over three hundred photographs, many of which have never been shown to the public) we recreate the excitement, the hardships, and the stories of the men who struck out in search of their fortunes. Though the precious metal was truly present in the rainbow-colored mountains, the hardships of extracting silver from the ground and the destruction of property by severe avalanches brought a tragic end to the mining days at Mineral King.

III. Though the mines failed, it was not long before enterprising men discovered forests of sequoia trees below Mineral King Valley. The redwoods were logged and the hillsides left barren. Mrs. Grace Allices, wife of the owner of Atwill Mill recounts the days of the lumber jacks. We recreate the milling days of Mineral King, the destruction of the redwoods and the final salvaging of what remained by a man who bought the land and donated it to the National Geographic Society. The hoped protection of these few remaining trees was then turned over to the United States government and placed in Sequoia National Park.

IV. We enter the twentieth century. The immediate needs of industrial America gives rise to jungles of concrete and steel. An increasing population of Americans, still searching to satisfy their frontier heritage, seek out the wilderness they can no longer see. We see a Yosemite National Park, incapable of handling the millions of visitors annually seeking a wilderness experience. In 1970 less than three per cent of the American environment is in its primeval state.

V. Mineral King, designated as a national game refuge by an act of Congress is to be developed by the Walt Disney Corporation. An area presently accessible to all is to be commercially developed at a cost of $35,000,000. A super highway is to cut its way through the national park, endangering the few remaining redwoods--along its route hillsides will be stripped to accomodate restaurants, ski lifts, golf courses, swimming pools, a convention center, theatres, a parking facility for 10,000 cars, and a chapel. The Sierra Nevada Mountains and Sequoia National Park are in jeopardy. The Sierra Club files suit in United States Supreme Court against the Forest Service who manages the area in question. Stewart Udall, former Secretary of the Interior, gives a candid interview concerning the threat of such a project to the environment; pollution of land, air, and water seem inevitable. The problems

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are discussed and the conflict explained.

This material comprises the subject matter of the film in a simplified manner. We have enclosed articles appearing in magazines and newspapers to provide further detail. There is also a series of slides showing various locations in Mineral King.

I am writing in hopes of interesting you in narrating three sections of the film. The opening sequence devoted to the American landscape painters, the history of the silver rush, and the history of the Atwill Mill. For these sequences we cannot think of a more perfect voice. I imagine proposals of this kind reach you by the hundreds, and this proposal is like all others in that we cannot offer any financial compensation for your time.

We believe the project is of far reaching importance. Each individual's right to an unspoiled environment is at question. We believe that the Mineral King film can in some way point a direction for those seeking both information on such issues and a manner of constructively dealing with them. Your narration would add a dimension to these sequences that would help generate a feeling for Mineral King as it was and is today. The film is by no means an illustrated lecture, and therefore the small amounts of narration must generate a meaningful response.

This is only a preliminary letter, which we hope will gain a positive response. The narration can be done at a time convenient for you. We also wish to answer any questions you may have concerning aspects of the film and its distribution.

We eagerly await your response,

Sincerely,

James Rascoe

Bruton Peterson

JR:ls

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